

**TOWN OF ARLINGTON**  
**TOWN MEETING PROCEDURES COMMITTEE**

*February 17, 2023*

**Call to Order**

The meeting of the Town Meeting Procedures Committee was called to order by Town Moderator Greg Christiana via online video conferencing on Friday, February 17, 2023, at 10:03 AM.

Written comments that attendees made during the meeting are appended to these minutes.

*Quorum*

A quorum was present: Adam Auster, Greg Christiana, Rebecca Gruber, Christopher Moore, and John Worden.

Robin Bergman, Elizabeth Dray, Guillermo Hamlin, Nora Mann, and Ines Zuckerman were also present.

*Introductions*

The members and attendees introduced themselves.

**New Business**

REPORT:

*Town Meeting  
Survey*

Mr. Christiana directed the attention of the committee to the results of a recent survey of Town Meeting members, which is appended to these minutes. During the meeting, this survey was often cited in the context of discussion of particular issues.

DISCUSSION:

*Meeting Logistics*

Mr. Christiana said that in-person Town Meeting could be staged in multiple spaces to accommodate social distancing or different levels of comfort about masks.

DISCUSSION:

*Committee Scope*

In response to a question from Mr. Christiana, Mr. Worden said that in the past the committee has focused exclusively on proposals to change rules at Town Meeting. He said the Town Moderator would also sometimes ask the committee to discuss various issues, at his or her discretion.

DISCUSSION:

*Invocation*

Mr. Christiana said poll results were divided, but that in survey comments some members expressed intense opposition to any religious invocation at Town Meeting.

Discussion included the past history of this practice, the time it consumes, and comfort levels of members as expressed in the poll.

DISCUSSION:

*Continuous Polling*

Mr. Christiana said that written comments from Mr. Auster about using the voting handsets for continuous polling will be appended to these minutes.

*Termination of Debate*

He said that knowing who favors terminating debate via a continuous poll could be useful to either the meeting or the Moderator, or both. He said that it could be more democratic if members knew in advance who was likely to move to end debate.

*Pro and Con Speakers*

Mr. Christiana also describe the possibility of using the handsets to identify speakers as wishing to speak pro or con, or to ask a question.

*Handsets*

He said there would be a learning curve for new uses of the voting handsets, but that no bylaw amendment would be required.

He referred members to the 2013 report of the Town Meeting Electronic Voting Study Committee as a useful resource in thinking about issues related to handset use. A link to this report is appended to these minutes

Discussion of different scenarios for handset use included issues related to participation, efficiency, and the purpose and culture of Town Meeting.

DISCUSSION:

*Speaking Order*

Mr. Christiana said the survey found 64% of respondents thought it was important that debate express a range of views, pro and con. He said that could be facilitated using the handsets.

He said that 67% felt it was important to balance those who spoke often with those who spoke infrequently.

Discussion touched on inclusion, efficiency, frustrations with virtual Town Meeting, ways that rules might be gamed, and the role of the Moderator.

DISCUSSION: Discussion included history and purpose of the consent  
*Consent Agenda* agenda, mechanics, scope, and difficulty of establishing it virtually.

DISCUSSION: Discussions touched on restrictions on debate, history  
*Resolutions* of resolutions, differing character of resolutions, and the role of Town Meeting.

*Future Meetings* Mr. Christiana said he would schedule another meeting in a few weeks based on communication with committee members.

MOTION: Mr. Moore moved that the meeting adjourn.  
*Adjournment* Ms. Gruber seconded the motion.  
Mr. Christina said that the meeting was adjourned.

**Adjournment** The meeting adjourned at 11:12 AM.

Adam Auster

Documents attached to these minutes:

1. Notice of meeting
2. Results of survey of Town Meeting members, "2022 Annual Town Meeting Feedback"
3. Written comments by attendees during the meeting
4. Written comments of Adam Auster, "Virtual instantaneous straw polls," provided to committee members prior to the meeting
5. The 2013 report of the Town Meeting Electronic Voting Study Committee is available from the Town website at this address:  
<https://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/9786/635271027338370000>